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**LET US PRAY**

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Compassionate God,  
you are our graced companion during  
our journey through life.

Be with us during this Lent in ways that we can feel  
and in ways that we can share with others.

Make us a part of that strong love by which  
you draw all things back to yourself,  
to your compassionate and healing ways  
in this broken, beloved world.

We ask this with the confidence of your children  
and in your strong and saving Name.

**AMEN.**



**FIRST WEEK OF LENT**



**“A pure heart create for me, O God,  
put a steadfast spirit within me.”**

PSALM 51:12



**A priest who had spent many years as a missionary in a low-resource country experienced deep religiosity among the people.**

Returning to the United States after many years, he was struck by the spiritual hunger he encountered. Where he had expected to find self-satisfaction and complacency arising from material prosperity, he often found among many an active quest for meaning and wholeness.

Deep within the human heart is a longing for something better and greater than what we ourselves create and experience. Intuitively, we know that our lives should connect more deeply with God and others. We long for a meaning that we are unable to create on our own. This first week of our Lenten retreat offers some direction in living out this God-given intuition.

Two vastly different images dominate the Scriptures this Sunday: a garden and a desert. The Judeo-Christian story begins with a garden that offers a vision of how to be in right relationship with God, others and creation itself. All was harmony, purity, singleness of purpose — the love of God — and through that, the ability to love one another and the world of which we are a part. Through our disobedience in the garden, we put ourselves and not God at the center, making ourselves both idol and idolater.

In our journey to return to the garden and restore right relationships, the desert is the way. Jesus' 40 days in the desert are the pattern for our 40 days of Lent. We step away from the noise and incessant demands of our lives for a time. The desert we seek is one of stillness and deep listening for who and whose we are. We learn again to long deeply for the God who is hope for healing and wholeness in ourselves and in this broken, beloved world.

Jesus emerged from his baptism in the Jordan to journey with the Spirit into the desert to discover his unique mission from God. We too embrace this annual desert time to be still and grasp once again our own unique mission. For those of us in Catholic health ministry, it is a mission to offer God's healing compassion to those we are called to care for in our homes, communities and especially in the facilities in which we serve. This is a journey we take together toward that garden place where the human heart is reborn and renewed. Along the way we learn to love again as intended from the beginning of our great story with our Creator.

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**FOR REFLECTION**

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*“Humility is not thinking less of yourself,  
but thinking of yourself less.”*

(C.S. Lewis)

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- ◇ What is your desert place this Lent where you can go apart and be quiet with God regularly?
- ◇ Whom will you ask to join you in mutual support this Lent?
- ◇ Where will you commit to a form of solidarity with human need this Lent, where you can join others in works of charity and justice?